

Grades 4–8

Muse Magazine. Tel.: 800-821-0115; <<http://www.musemag.com/>>.

National Geographic for Kids. Tel.: 800-368-2728; <<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngforkids/>>.

Grades 4–9

Calliope; Cobblestone; Faces; Footsteps; Odyssey. Tel.: 800-821-0115; <<http://www.cobblestonepub.com/>>.

Grades 6–9

Scientific American Explorations. Tel.: 800-285-5264. <<http://www.explorations.org/>>.

Editorial

“In a Peaceful Frame of Mind: Patients Demanding Control over Their Medical Care May Not Relinquish It in Their Final Days”

Anna Quindlen

It was the part about reading that got to me. By the time Joan and Chester Nimitz Jr. had decided to die together, their laundry list of physical losses was nearly as long as their rich and fruitful lives. Chester Nimitz, 86, a retired admiral and CEO and the son of the Pacific fleet commander in World War II, was suffering congestive heart failure, constant back pain and stomach problems so severe he'd lost 30 pounds. His wife, 89, who had gone to dental school in her native England but stayed home to raise their three daughters, kept breaking bones because of osteoporosis and needed round-the-clock care. Once she went blind, she could no longer read.

Audio books or no audio books, the very notion of becoming incapable of seeing words on the page gave me a bad case of the shudders, and suggested that the distinction between a life worth living and one worth leaving is probably different for each of us.

Some may fear grinding pain unresponsive to medication. For others it would be the constant losses of physical degeneration or the end of independence, an existence supervised by caregivers. For Joan and Chester Nimitz, who until a few years ago lived a life full of gardening and golfing and reading, it was all of those. “Do not dial 911 in the event we are discovered unconscious but still alive,” read a note left behind in their apartment at a retirement facility. It ended, “We wish our friends and relatives to know that we are leaving their company in a peaceful frame of mind.”

The greatest advance in health care in our lifetime has not been transplants or new pharmaceuticals. It has been the rise of the informed consumer. Beginning with the natural-childbirth movements and breast-cancer activism of the 1970s, inspired by AIDS patients who refused to take no for an answer, Americans have increasingly

demanded more information and more control. People who once took orders from their physicians are now willing only to take advice. They look for information on Web sites, in newspapers and magazines, and in conversations with friends, so that cocktail parties sometimes sound more like hospital waiting rooms than social events.

Why would anyone expect people who have become knowledgeable about cholesterol and PSAs, chemotherapy and MRIs, to suddenly cede control at the end of life? Some medical professionals decried the decision the Nimitzes made, insisting that progress in pain management and advances in modern medicine made such draconian action unnecessary. Perhaps they have never been at the bedside of a dying person being tortured by continuing invasive treatment despite the fact that all hope of recovery is long gone. The truth is that modern medicine, which too often does things because they are possible, not because they are useful, has helped make some of this inevitable.

That is apparent in poll figures that show that two out of every three Americans support the right to euthanasia. It was apparent when the people of Oregon twice approved a statute supporting physician-assisted suicide in the form of a prescription for barbiturates for properly screened terminally ill patients. When that law went into effect in 1997, opponents predicted a bloodbath, vans of the depressed converging on the state in a mass suicide binge. Of course it didn't happen. In three years, 70 people ended their lives after doctors determined they were already near death. But there are still those so-called right-to-life groups fighting the statute, and they've found a friend in John Ashcroft. In the midst of all the other business of his office, the attorney general took time to try to subvert the will of the people by announcing that Oregon doctors would lose their prescription rights if they "participate in an assisted suicide."

His opponents were skeptical when Ashcroft said in the opening statement at his confirmation hearing, "I well understand the role of attorney general is to enforce the law as it is, not as I would have it." Their skepticism was well founded. Ashcroft, a proponent of states' rights, even did a bit of jurisdiction shopping to attack the Oregon law from his federal perch. The editor of Human Events, a conservative weekly, said on radio that this was entirely proper: "It is the job of the federal government to go in and protect the life of the person whose life is being taken, even if that person wants to commit suicide."

How unspeakably paternalistic and condescending! How contrary to the American ethos of self-determination and the right to be left alone. Should the Feds have sent marshals in to wrest the pills away from the retired admiral and his well-read and tough-minded wife, united in their desire not to become shadows of their former selves? Chester Nimitz Jr., a man who had become accustomed in the service of his country to taking charge, left a meticulously organized file for his daughters labeled, "WHEN CWN DIES." He ended his life sooner rather than later because he was afraid if he died first of heart disease his wife would not be strong enough to take pills on her own. "That's the one last thing I have to do for your mother," he told one of his

daughters. Since the Nimitzes' deaths their daughters have received many letters, filled with rage and grief, from other grown children detailing the indignities their parents suffered during the dying process.

Maybe you believe you could live with the pain, or the immobility, or the incontinence, or the fear, or the loss of literacy. Maybe you wouldn't mind the tubes or the injections or the medications keeping you alive even if you were only days from death, even if you were turned into a medical marionette. But those who can't bear those conditions should be able to use any means to avoid spending their last days or months or even years in a situation they find humiliating and degrading. Some doctors have determined that life ends with something called brain death; perhaps there are those who conclude that it ought to end with life death, the depletion and disappearance of those things that have defined them and given them solace and pleasure. Then, as Chester and Joan Nimitz wrote, "consciously, rationally, deliberately," lights out.

Anna Quindlen is a masterful writer. Skimming through this editorial the first time, I found myself nodding along in total agreement. I was horrified at the image of marshals bursting into the private home of a quiet couple to "wrest pills away." The "paternalistic and condescending" words of the editor of *Human Events* left me outraged. And the story of the Nimitzes' suffering was heartbreaking. It was easy to agree with Quindlen's position.

However, during a second reading and discussion with Jessica Lawrence, an eighth-grade teacher with whom I planned to embark on a study of editorial texts, easy agreement gave way to uncomfortable questioning. What about the Nimitzes' family? we wondered. How did they feel about their parents' decision? How do we know that Mrs. Nimitz actually wanted to die, that the decision was entirely hers? Considering the story from other perspectives, and questioning Quindlen's passionate defense of their decision, left us wondering whether the Nimitzes' actions were indeed justifiable, and whether we would make the same choice in similar circumstances.

Digging deeper into the story of the Nimitz family also led us further into the issue of euthanasia itself. What role does religion play in the euthanasia debate? we wondered. Why have so few people taken advantage of Oregon's assisted suicide law? Does allowing doctors to assist with suicides compromise their role as caregivers? Is the view of death as defeat a wrong interpretation of the end of life? How much of this have we brought on ourselves by extending life expectancies and curing diseases?

The more we thought about the issue, the more questions arose. Most were simply left to hang in the air; they didn't require a specific answer; it was the asking itself that prompted thought and understanding. Questioning Quindlen's edi-

torial helped Jessica and me to think through the many considerations surrounding the complex issue of euthanasia, and eventually led us to our own independent conclusions. In the end we both decided that it is not as simple as “Yes, euthanasia should be legal” or “No, euthanasia should not be legal.” We found that there are many complex subtleties that need to be considered, both by society and by individuals, when determining when and how to end a life.

Thinking Through the Genre

Editorials reflect the essence of our democratic society. Here is a form of writing that is entirely dedicated to civic discourse, to shaping opinions, changing minds, and effecting change. Certainly, opinions and ideas are present in all forms of text. But it is in editorials that we find arguments and ideas most clearly developed and most ripe for debate. Introducing students to editorials is essential if we want our children to grow up to become thoughtful, participatory members of society. An individual who can read, understand, question, and critique an editorial text is an independent thinker who can be a leader in civic discourse. A writer who can use language to persuade others can influence policy, direct individuals’ actions, and re-create the world around him or her. It is only with such thoughtful, literate individuals that our democracy will continue to flourish (Gutmann 1987).

Most children are taught from an early age not to question authority. Everyone from mom and dad to teachers to Scout leaders expects that children will listen and follow directions obediently. And this is good . . . to a point. At some point, we want students to learn to make decisions for themselves, not rashly but thoughtfully. We want them to ask questions, carefully consider alternatives, and choose wisely. Teaching students to read and respond to editorials provides them with a wonderful opportunity to develop these skills. Good editorial readers don’t simply accept what is said; they ask questions, carefully consider alternatives, and ultimately determine their own position on the issue.

This thoughtful interaction with editorial text allows readers to better understand their own positions on confusing and controversial issues. As I write this, the United States is in the midst of determining whether or not we should attack Iraq. Personally, I have very mixed feelings on the subject. Part of my indecision comes from realizing that I simply don’t have enough information. But even when I read news articles on the subject, I still struggle to understand my response to the facts. In this instance, as in many others, the op-ed pages of the newspaper, the opinion pieces on National Public Radio, and intense discussions with my husband are most helpful to me as I seek to figure out where I stand. Reading or listening to the opinions of others and understanding the thinking behind their positions—

whether I agree or disagree—help me to think through the facts, my own feelings, and the multiple considerations bound up in an issue. And I believe that as a citizen of a democracy and a member of a community it is my responsibility to thoughtfully consider such issues, seek to understand, and then speak out to support, warn against, or question decisions that could affect us all.

Inspiring public debate is indeed the purpose of an editorial. Anna Quindlen (1994) describes her goals as a columnist as follows:

The standard view of the columnist is of the Voice of God, intoning the last word on any subject: Capital punishment is wrong. Abortion is a woman’s right. The point is the conclusion. This seems to me uninteresting, this preaching to the converted, this emphasis on product rather than on process. From the beginning it seemed to me that the point was not to make readers think like me. It was to make them think.

Hence, Quindlen writes about what she passionately believes to be important, subjects close to her heart and issues she wants people to thoughtfully consider. This is true of all great editorial writers; their writing is born out of passion. Dorothy Thompson, who was one of the first female columnists and is still considered one of the best, was often criticized for writing with too much emotion. She did not follow the typical, dry formula that her male colleagues had used for decades, and she was derided as being “too feminine.” However, among all the negative comments, one reviewer (Kurth 1990) correctly noted,

Dorothy Thompson writes fierily. Sometimes she seems to write almost hysterically. . . . She gets mad. She pleads; she denounces. And the result is that where the intellectualized columns of her colleagues fade when pressed between the leaves of a book, these columns still ring.

As a teacher I want students to learn to write as Dorothy Thompson did—fierily. I want them to be able to take their frustrations, joys, and sorrows, recognize the larger issues surrounding their experiences, and craft an editorial that has the power to create change in their communities. To do so, they must learn to balance passion with discipline. They will need to find a way to convince their audience through the use of well-reasoned arguments, clear structure, and strong evidence as well as compelling examples, persuasive language, and at times, raw emotion. Editorial writers must be clinical about their writing without losing their passion for a subject. This is a difficult balance to maintain; it requires a deep understanding of the genre, thorough knowledge about the subject, and thoughtful reflection about one’s own position and objectives. Yet, once mastered, these

skills have wide application in many aspects of civic life. Everything from persuading a boss to give a raise to leading a petition drive for better community libraries requires this unique blend of passion and discipline. If, in the classroom, we can support students' mastery of these skills, we not only equip them to be successful editorial writers, but we also empower them to be vocal, responsible, and effective members of our democratic society.

Envisioning the Unit

If ever a group of students needed to be empowered, it was this class. Jessica Lawrence's eighth-grade students attended Horace Mann Middle School; it was the lowest-scoring middle school in the district, and they knew it. Despite the fact that they had worked hard in Jessica's class and grown in their ability to read and write (moving up on average a remarkable three grade levels in reading over a six-month period). Although they were comfortable in the classroom, the rest of their world felt out of their control. Most lived below the poverty line, nearly all had parents who were divorced, a large number were immigrants, and few saw school as much more than a race to the finish line: high school graduation. Many had the typical teenage frustrations about parents who are too controlling and teachers who don't listen, but some had problems that ran far deeper than that. LaTisha worried about a friend who was trying to get pregnant at fourteen. (Some students' names have been changed in this chapter to protect privacy.) Jamar worried about his dad returning to beat up his mom. Kristin worried about her mom's increasing use of alcohol. These students had many worries, but they had no idea what to do about any of them: "I'm just a kid, I can't do anything, no one will listen to me, I can't make any decisions."

And then one bright sunny day in April, one of Jessica's students brought a gun to school. He had been picked on by a group of students and had brought the weapon to intimidate them. Thankfully, nothing happened. The weapon was recovered and disciplinary action was taken. But the incident left both Jessica and me rattled. We wondered about the relevance of the editorial study we were about to begin. Did notions of civic discourse and powerful persuasion really matter in the face of a gun in the classroom? Absolutely! we decided. It was precisely because this particular student felt he had no voice that he had brought a weapon to school. He felt alone and powerless, and the only choice he believed he had was to carry a gun. Studying editorials was a way to provide students with other, better choices.

Our work took on a new urgency. Suddenly, this wasn't just about empowerment so that these students could be good adult members of society someday. It

was about empowerment so that they would see the possibilities in their lives now. Through editorial reading, we wanted students to see that the issues they felt frustrated or overwhelmed by were not unique to them. Teen pregnancy is an issue that many people are concerned about; many people have opinions about how to address it. Curbing alcohol abuse is a struggle that is debated vociferously. School safety, bullying, child custody issues—all of the things these students were struggling with are societal struggles as well. By reading and discussing editorials we hoped that students would develop their ability to understand and analyze complex issues. We wanted them to be able to think through their own positions, to understand other perspectives, and to find the value in dialogue and debate.

We also wanted students to find their voice. We wanted them to recognize that they can and should have a say in the issues that affect their lives. Recognizing and acting upon the opportunity to participate in civic discourse is what editorial writing is all about. Students needed to see that there is a potential audience out there and to understand how to communicate their ideas to that audience. They needed to know that there is power in using the frustrations and difficulties of their private lives as fuel for public writing: the power to persuade or help others. LaTisha, for example, needed to be able to turn her concern for her friend into an editorial warning young women of the difficulties of teen parenting. Jamar and Anh, both concerned about the abusive situations they witnessed in their lives, needed to find an audience and platform into which to channel their concerns, Anh by writing directly to abuse victims to give them hope in an alternative and to encourage them to seek help, and Jamar by writing to lawmakers, urging stricter penalties for abusers.

Certainly, an editorial study cannot guarantee that a student will not bring a gun to school. But it can empower students to see themselves as participants in a larger discourse, members of society who have a voice and need to use it to effect change in their community. Getting to this understanding, however, would take a lot of salesmanship from Jessica, plenty of opportunity to read, write, and discuss texts, and a solid set of goals that progressively challenged students to think more deeply, analyze more completely, and reflect more thoughtfully.

Teaching the Unit—Reading Workshop

Drugs, school uniforms, teen pregnancy, the death penalty—these were the issues that Jessica's students told us they cared about. So this was where we began. During the first few days of class Jessica brought in editorials about high-interest, highly controversial topics and encouraged students to talk about them. The students were immediately engaged; they loved sharing their opinions and talking

Reading Workshop—Editorial **Goals and Instructional Focus Progression**

	Reading Comprehension Study	Accountable Talk Study
	Goal: Students will learn to read, understand, question, and analyze editorial texts in order to develop an improved independent understanding of the issues addressed.	Goal: Students will learn to effectively discuss and debate controversial issues with peers in small groups.
Weeks 1–2	Developing Comprehension—Asking the Essential Questions Students will learn to effectively use a series of guiding questions in order to better understand an author’s argument. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As you read, ask the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is the issue? What is the author’s position? What are the arguments that support this position? How does this editorial change how I feel? Before you read, make predictions, based on your knowledge of the issue, about possible responses. After you read, use these questions to solidify your understanding. Are these questions helpful? Why, or why not? Developing Comprehension—Decoding the Editorial Structure Students will recognize and use common structures and language found in editorials to improve comprehension.	Developing Appropriate Attitudes and Behaviors for Peer Group Discussions Students will learn what is appropriate to say and do before, during, and after a peer debate. Presenting and Substantiating Your Opinion Students will learn to effectively share their ideas aloud. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What language is appropriate to use when sharing an opinion? How can you most effectively address your audience? How can you most effectively support your opinion with evidence from the text and/or your experience or prior knowledge?
Weeks 3–4	Questioning the Text Students will learn to ask thoughtful and thought-provoking questions of the text and the author. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions about the small details and the big ideas of the editorial. Ask questions about things that are said and things that are left unsaid. Which questions are most helpful to you? Why? Which questions, if any, do you need to have answered? Where could you find answers to those questions? What questions are you left with after you have read and analyzed the editorial? 	Persuading Your Peers Students will learn to persuade others through oral argument. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to your peers’ ideas. What are their strengths? weaknesses? Where do you agree? disagree? How can you persuade your peers to agree with your position? What questions can you ask? What evidence can you use? What comparisons can you make? Which persuasive techniques are most effective? Why?
Weeks 5–6	Determining Your Position Students will reflect privately on their reading, questioning, and debating in order to determine for themselves their opinion of the editorial and their position on the issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your opinion of the editorial? What do you agree with? disagree with? What is the editorial’s greatest strength? greatest weakness? Was the editorial convincing? Why, or why not? Where do you stand on the issue? What questions do you still have? What additional information do you need to help you determine your own position? How do your questions help you to determine your opinion of the editorial and your position on the issue? Evaluating Reading Progress—Self-Reflection and Teacher Evaluation	Learning from Your Peers Students will reflect on their discussions to determine how participating in a debate shaped their understanding of an issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did you think about the issue before the debate began? after? How did your participation in the debate affect your understanding of the issue? What did you find most persuasive during the debate? Why? What did you find least persuasive? Why? Evaluating Peer Debate—Self-, Class, and Teacher Evaluation

about “real” stuff in English class. Trouble was, this engagement didn’t necessarily bring rigor. Students loved talking about whether there should be uniforms on campus, but they had little substance behind their opinions. The editorials that Jessica provided were quickly skimmed and set aside; students didn’t understand their relevance and certainly weren’t swayed by their arguments. Discussions quickly degenerated into “should so,” “should not” debates reminiscent of a bad sit-com.

At the very beginning of a study, this is okay. Before rigor can be introduced, engagement is essential. But once Jessica had succeeded in capturing students’ interest, we needed to add substance to their work. Observing students, we saw that one of the biggest obstacles we faced was the editorial form itself. Persuasive text was unfamiliar to most students, and they simply didn’t know how to approach it. Jessica and I decided to address this challenge by teaching students to use a set of “essential questions.” These standard, straightforward queries represent the expectations that readers of any editorial have when picking up the text. Introducing these questions to students, and teaching them to look for answers in the text, would provide a scaffold upon which to build basic comprehension of an editorial’s meaning.

SAMPLE LESSON: **Week 1—Reading Workshop**

AREA OF STUDY:	Reading comprehension
FOCUS:	Asking essential questions
TEXT:	“No Helmet, No Skating?” from <i>Junior Scholastic</i>
RESPONSE:	Reading and commenting on editorial text

The groans sounded as soon as Jessica put the editorial on the overhead. “We looked at this topic yesterday, Ms. Lawrence. Let’s talk about something new.” Jessica and I exchanged a smile. We had expected some resistance, and the students did not disappoint. “You’re right,” Jessica responded. “We did look at this topic yesterday, and in fact I gave you this editorial to read. But, be honest now, how many of you really read and understood it?” A few hands went up, but most students just sheepishly stared at the desk in front of them. “I am thrilled that you are excited about the topics we’ve been looking at, and delighted that you have opinions about these issues,” Jessica said. “But I am concerned that often you can’t really explain the reasons for your opinions. And I’m concerned that you aren’t really reading and understanding the editorials that we’ve been looking at. Controversial issues aren’t just things to argue about; they are real problems that need to be addressed. In order to do that effectively, you need to understand and listen to both sides of an argument, and part of that is being able to read and

understand an editorial. So that's what we are going to do today. We are going to set aside our opinions for a little while in order to focus on what one author is saying in her editorial."

Receiving grudging agreement, Jessica continued. At the front of the room she posted a chart with four essential questions:

Essential Questions for Editorial Readers

1. What is the issue?
2. What is the author's position?
3. What are the arguments that support this position?
4. How does this editorial change how I think about this issue?

"These are the questions I have in my mind when I pick up an editorial," Jessica explained. "They are the guiding questions that help me understand." She talked through each of the questions in turn and then reintroduced the text for the day. The editorial she had chosen was a very short piece from the "Debate" section of *Junior Scholastic*. This magazine provides great introductory editorials that are short, accessible, and topical. This particular text addressed whether young people should legally be required to wear helmets when skating—a hot topic for many of Jessica's students.

"Okay, I'm going to show you how I use these questions to help me understand this particular editorial. While I work, I want you to observe what I'm doing so that you can apply the process later on your own." With students following along on the overhead, Jessica read aloud the "Yes: Helmets Should Be Required" editorial.

Yes: Helmets Should Be Required

People who are dumb enough to skate without a helmet ought to have some sense knocked into them. Unfortunately, those people learn their lessons too late—and we all have to pay for it.

Helmet opponents like to point out that relatively few in-line skaters receive head injuries. But the head injuries that do occur are almost always serious—and sometimes fatal. Furthermore, skaters who do not wear helmets kid themselves that they are making a personal choice. The truth is that their choice affects many others. A massive head injury is not cheap to treat. Taxpayers and insurance companies have to cover the cost of long-term care for people with brain damage.

The best way to cut those costs is to prevent injuries. The best way to prevent the injuries is to make young people, who do the most skating, wear helmets.

As she read, Jessica paused often, thought through what she had just read, and referred to the essential questions. After reading the title, for example, she noted that she could make a guess at both question 1 and 2. Underlining the words *helmets* and *required*, Jessica commented, "These words give me a clue about question 1; this editorial clearly has something to do with requiring helmets." She wrote a 1 in the margin of the transparency and drew arrows to the words that had given her the clue. "And this word *should* tells me that the author's position is in favor of requiring helmets," she continued, underlining *should* and drawing an arrow to a 2 that she wrote in the margin.

Jessica continued in a similar manner through the rest of the editorial, reading, thinking aloud, and taking notes in the margin. When she was finished, she summarized what she had learned. She systematically worked through each of the first three questions, restating the question and then explaining her findings. When she got to question 4, however, she paused. "Now, I haven't yet answered this question. This is one that I have to think through on my own. I can't find that answer in the editorial. So . . . how does this editorial change how I think about this issue? I guess I've always thought that helmets are a good idea, and after learning about the seriousness of the injuries that can result from not wearing a helmet, and about how the rest of us have to pay for this negligence, I think I'm even more convinced that they should be required. I don't like taking choices away from kids, but the damage that could be done by not wearing a helmet seems severe enough that it may be worth it."

Jessica's entire think-aloud had taken just under five minutes. Thanks to a very short text, she was able to keep it quick and to the point. Then it was time for the students to apply the strategy to editorials on their own. To make sure that they were clear on expectations, Jessica reviewed her process with the class: "What did I do to make sense of this editorial?" she asked. Students' responses resulted in the following guidelines:

What to Do When Reading an Editorial

- Think about what you expect before you start reading.
- Take your time. Don't rush.
- Reread to make sure nothing is missed.
- Use the essential questions to help figure out what to look for.
- Think things through in your own words.
- Add answers to the Essential Questions as you read.
- Underline important things in the text.
- Make notes in the margins.
- Use the essential questions to summarize what you find at the end.
- Wait until you are finished and understand the editorial before thinking about your own opinion.

Satisfied that students were ready, Jessica distributed the opposing editorial, “No: Helmets Should Be Optional,” and instructed students to read the text and respond to the essential questions on their own.

For the first time that week, students actually read the editorial. As they sought answers to the essential questions, students tried to emulate the behaviors they had observed in Jessica’s model. And the resulting jump in comprehension was amazing. When students came back together, they were able to discuss the text itself. They could articulate the author’s arguments, and they were able to sustain a discussion about the issue that was much more than the repetitive “should so,” “should not” arguments we had heard in previous days. This improvement was evident to the students themselves. “It really helped to have those questions,” one commented at the end of the lesson. “They made me know what to look for when I read. When I understand the editorial, it’s a lot more interesting.”

Throughout the course of the editorial study, the list of essential questions proved tremendously helpful. We used these questions repeatedly, brainstorming possible answers before reading (schema activation), looking for answers during reading (monitoring comprehension), and summarizing our findings after reading (synthesizing understanding).

With questions in mind, students were soon able to breeze through the *Junior Scholastic* editorial and similar short, relatively straightforward editorials. Knowing what to look for kept them focused and gave them direction. However, as editorials became more complex, comprehension faltered. Lack of familiarity with the structure and language of persuasive text caused students to struggle to respond to the essential questions. In order to understand the substance of the text, students needed to understand a bit more about the structure, style, and language of editorials. They needed to know where to look for things such as a position statement, explanation of an issue, or supporting arguments. They needed to understand more about persuasive techniques, to know, for example, that authors often ask rhetorical questions in order to bolster their arguments but that these questions are not intended to be answered by the reader. And they needed to recognize the language that is often used by authors to signal when they are making an argument, denouncing a counterargument, or revealing their position. In the following lesson, Jessica aimed to help students decode the language of editorials by teaching them to recognize these signal words.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 2—Reading Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: Reading comprehension

FOCUS: Decoding the editorial structure

TEXT:

“Lighter Loads? Silly Bill Targets Student Backpacks” from *San Diego Union Tribune*

RESPONSE:

Chart showing signal words and their purposes

Jessica placed a copy of the “Lighter Loads?” editorial on the overhead. The text addressed concern over the amount of weight that students carry in their backpacks, arguing that a bill before the state legislature that would limit the size of textbooks was ridiculous. Instead, the editorial argued, schools ought to bring back lockers, even if transparent ones. The students had previously read and discussed this editorial and were comfortable with its content.

Jessica explained that today they were going to look at the text differently, not looking for answers to essential questions but looking for the words that signal where answers might be found. “There are certain words that authors of persuasive text use a lot when constructing their arguments. They provide a signal for readers, saying ‘Pay attention, I’m about to state the position’ or ‘Look over here, I’m about to explain why the other side is wrong.’ If we know what these words are, then it will make reading and understanding editorials easier.” Students looked very skeptical. “Let me show you what I mean,” Jessica said.

Using an overhead marker, Jessica read through the text, circling words such as *unless*, *so*, *however*, *but*. As she worked, she thought aloud about the significance of the words. For example, in the following sentence, she circled the word *really*: “The blame really resides with California schools, which have been removing lockers for much of the past decade.” “The word *really* tells me that the author is now going to tell me his opinion about the problem,” Jessica said. “It says, ‘Before, I’ve been telling you about their side, but now I’m going to tell you what I think is the truth.’”

In another paragraph, she circled the phrase *obvious solution* and the words *then* and *and*:

One obvious solution to the “problem” is transparent lockers. Then, students wouldn’t be able to hide drugs or weapons. . . . And they could store their books and other possessions, using them as needed during the school day. And they would still be exposed to a serious-minded curriculum.

“The word *solution* tells me that this is the idea the author thinks is best,” Jessica explained “and the fact that he wrote *obvious* tells me he thinks it is much better than any other solution. The word *then* signals that he’s going to tell me the reason why his solution is a good one. And the word *and*, which is used twice, tells me that he’s going to give me more than one reason why his solution is the right one.”

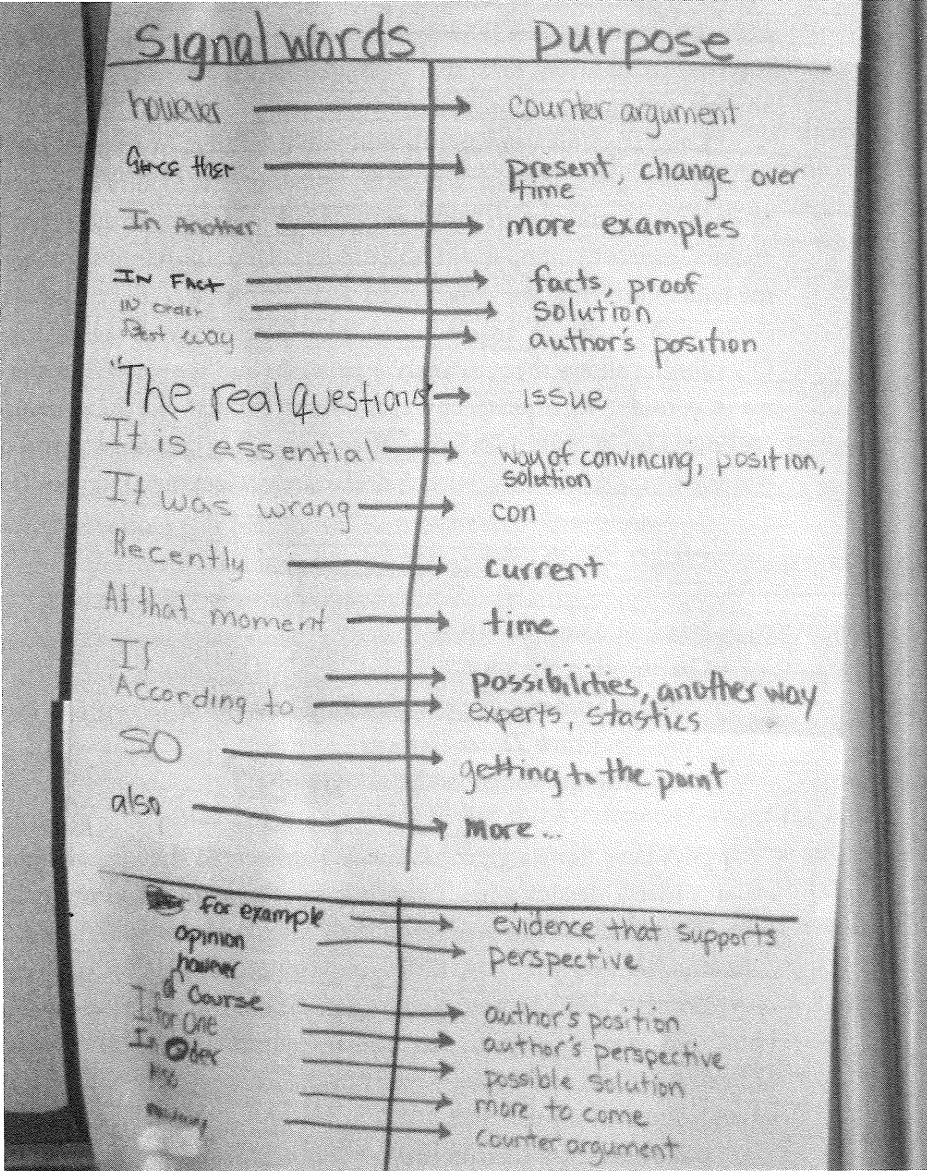
It took only a few paragraphs of modeling for students to catch on, and soon they were sharing their own ideas about signal words in the short editorial. To support their learning, Jessica kept notes of their findings on a two-column chart, recording signal words in the left-hand column and a brief explanation of the purpose of the word in the right-hand one. At the end of the text, the class paused and reflected on the chart that they had made together. “Does this make sense?” Jessica asked. The answer was a resounding “Yes!” After struggling for a week to read and understand editorials, students clearly recognized the value of noting signal words.

To reinforce their understanding, Jessica asked students to take out their editorial folders, review the other editorials that they had read, and look for signal words. “Search out the signal words that we have already talked about. Are they always used the same way? Can you find other words or phrases that are used to signal meaning in an editorial? What are they? What do they signal?” Jessica instructed students to work on their own at first, and then to share their findings with their peers. She passed out sheets of blank chart paper for student teams to record their results. The conversations that ensued were wonderful, especially when students found multiple words that served the same purpose or found the same word used for different purposes. Talking about the words they had found and charting their findings really helped to clarify understanding.

At the end of the period, Jessica collected and posted students’ charts (see Figure 4.1). They had developed some amazingly long and thoughtful lists that would prove very supportive for future editorial reading. Debriefing, students unanimously agreed that learning about signal words had been very helpful. So helpful, in fact, that William commented loudly, “How come nobody taught us about this before? This makes sense!”

Practice, the essential questions, and knowledge of editorial structures and language supported students’ ability to read and understand editorial texts. By the end of the second week of the study, students could delve into most of the editorials put in front of them and comprehend the issue and the author’s arguments. I should point out, however, that the editorials we used with students were still selected with great care. When Jessica and I looked for editorial texts, our primary concern was content: Would the topic be interesting for students? If we couldn’t say yes, the text was set aside. In addition, we considered the difficulty of the language and the level of background knowledge required. Many editorial pieces from daily or weekly publications expect that readers have an ongoing and immediate understanding of an issue from reading the front page or hearing about it on the news. Jessica’s eighth-grade students were not exactly newshounds, and while

Figure 4.1 Student’s Chart of Signal Words and Their Purposes



it was reasonable to expect them to infer some information about the issue from the text, it would have been unreasonable to expect that they could read and understand a complex editorial about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example. A final important consideration was whether the text presented editorials on both sides of an issue. These texts (found most often in *New York Times Upfront* and

occasionally in the “Debate” section of *USA Today*) were incredibly useful as teaching tools. They allowed us to model or teach a strategy with one side and then to have the students practice that strategy using the text representing the other perspective. In addition, texts that presented two sides really helped to facilitate text analysis and student discussions.

Once students were able to read and understand editorials fairly consistently, we switched gears. Instead of teaching students how to answer questions, we began to encourage students to ask them. Asking questions of the text and the author enables readers to grapple with their individual understandings of the editorial and the issue. Querying the information and ideas used in the editorials provides students with a chance to do more than simply say “I agree” or “I disagree.” Questioning allows them to analyze strengths and weaknesses in the author’s argument, consider other perspectives, and think through the many considerations that are bound up in a complex issue. After thoroughly questioning and considering an editorials, readers are able to more deliberately refine their own position on an issue.

SAMPLE LESSON:	Week 3—Reading Workshop
AREA OF STUDY:	Reading comprehension
FOCUS:	Questioning the text
TEXT:	“Should Students Do the Grading?” by Kevin Green and Nick Brown, from <i>New York Times Upfront</i>
RESPONSE:	Recording questions in the margins

“You guys have done a great job finding answers to the essential questions of editorial readers,” Jessica said. “Now it is your turn to ask some questions of your own. These authors are expressing their ideas and opinions, and as a reader, you shouldn’t just nod your head and agree with everything. It’s your responsibility to question what they say. You need to get in there and question their evidence, their ideas, and their arguments. Asking hard questions, not all of which need to be answered, is one great way to figure out the strength of an editorial and determine where you stand on the issue.”

Jessica placed a transparency of “Should Students Do the Grading?” on the overhead. This *New York Times Upfront* editorial had been written by students in response to a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that allowed teachers to have students grade the quizzes and tests of their peers. The text contained two relatively succinct responses—one supporting the “yes” position and the other the “no” position. This contrast provided a perfect example of why questioning editorials is so important. Jessica planned to use the “yes” editorial to model; then she would allow the students to practice their own questioning on the “no” piece.

After reading the “yes” editorial one time through to ensure basic comprehension, Jessica returned to the text to think more critically about its content. She reread the editorial, stopping every paragraph or so to reflect, ask questions, and record her queries in the margins.

By grading each other’s papers and seeing the problems their peers encounter, as well as their own, students double their exposure to the troubles that they may meet on future exams and tests. The basic purpose of school is to learn not just what others have done right, but to learn from what they have done wrong. How better to teach this than to put it directly into the lives of the students?

In response to this paragraph, for example, she asked the following questions:

- How will they be grading the tests? Will they be using a rubric or just marking the answers right and wrong? If they are just recording a score, how does this help them learn what was done wrong?
- Doesn’t this risk invading other people’s privacy? Do all students want their peers to know what kind of grades they are getting?
- Are there other ways to learn from mistakes? Would self-grading work? How about looking as a class at common mistakes? Is peer grading so much more effective than these methods?

After she had completed rereading and questioning the text, Jessica explained how this process had helped her think differently about the editorial. “After reading it through just one time, I was ready to agree with the author and move on. But now, I am less certain. I don’t necessarily disagree with him, but I have some concerns about how student grading would be used, and I wonder if it is really okay in all classrooms.” Many students were nodding their heads in agreement. After listening to Jessica’s thoughtful questions, they weren’t sure where they stood on the issue either.

Together the class reviewed Jessica’s process. “What did I do?” Jessica probed. Students noted that she had read the text more than once, had taken her time, pausing to think frequently, and had been willing to question everything. “What kinds of questions did I ask?” Jessica wanted to make sure that students understood the scope of potential questions to ask. Students reviewed her notes on the overhead, shared ideas, and together developed the following list:

Things to Question About an Editorial

- *Sources of information.* “Where did you get this information? Is it reliable?”
- *Author’s assumptions.* “How do you know that? Would all people agree?”

- *Alternative possibilities.* “What are other ways that this problem could be addressed?”
- *Possible consequences.* “What will be the consequences if this does/does not happen? Who will benefit? Who will face problems?”
- *Vocabulary.* “What does this word mean?”
- *Things that are confusing.* “This argument is confusing. What are you really saying?”
- *Contradicting evidence.* “What about this other information [not included in the editorial]? How does it fit with the argument?”

Reviewing this list, Jessica stressed that these were general types of questions that provided a good starting place but that should not just be repeated verbatim. “When you are questioning editorials on your own, you need to ask these types of questions, but make them specific to your text. It is helpful to ask questions only if you directly address the specific facts and ideas of that editorial.” She also encouraged students not to worry too much about finding answers. “For now, the important thing is asking good questions. We’ll worry about whether we need to find answers later.”

Then it was the students’ turn. Jessica passed out a photocopy of the text that included both the “yes” and “no” positions. She asked students to read the “no” position on their own and answer the first three essential questions. After a few minutes of reading and a quick pair-share to check for understanding, Jessica encouraged students to reread and question the text, recording their questions in the margins of the editorial. The room became very still. Nearly everyone in the class worked hard to reread and think carefully about the questions they had for each argument or piece of evidence in the text. Some simply parroted a few of the more generic questions: “Where did you get this information?” and “What evidence do you have?” But many developed original, thoughtful questions that responded directly to the text itself, especially to the author’s opening example about students insulting each other about their grades. “Why doesn’t the teacher stop the students from calling out insults? Where was she? Maybe the problem is the teacher?” one student wondered. Another questioned, “If teasing is a problem, why don’t students just write the grades on the papers instead of calling them out?”

At the end of class, there was a new sense of control in the room. The editorials no longer held all the authority; students realized they had power, too. “Questioning lets me feel like I’m in control of the editorial,” explained Ca’Darius. “It makes me think.” However, others weren’t so sure. “I like it, but I don’t like it,” Rosy wavered. “It makes the reading more interesting, but it also makes it harder to form an opinion. I’m left with too many questions.”



It should be noted that the classroom routines of an editorial study look somewhat different from those of most other genre studies. The typical structure of whole-class mini-lesson with a common text, followed by extended workshop time with independently chosen texts, doesn’t work so well for an editorial study. To begin with, there simply aren’t enough strong, accessible editorials available for students to have a wide range of selection for independent reading. And even if there were, I’m not sure that such an approach would be appropriate. After all, the very nature of the editorial genre makes these texts ripe for public discourse, and in order for this to occur in the classroom, students need to have read common texts. In Jessica’s classroom, most days, editorial reading workshop roughly followed this schedule:

Ms. Lawrence’s Editorial Reading Workshop Classroom Schedule

10–15 min.	Whole-class mini-lesson (common text)
10–15 min.	Independent strategy application (common text)
10–20 min.	Peer debate (based on common texts)
15–30 min.	Independent reading and individual conferring (student-selected texts, not necessarily from the editorial genre)

At the beginning of the study, when students were first becoming comfortable with the editorial genre, the peer debate time was something of a struggle. Students didn’t yet see the subtleties of the issues, and consequently the quality of the discussion was limited. However, as students really began to question the details and ideas of editorial texts, the understandings that they brought with them to the debate improved. They began to state their opinions more thoughtfully and explain their ideas in greater depth. These small-group discussions became much more interesting and engaging.

However, Jessica and I wanted to push students further. We wanted them to do more than just share their opinions; we wanted students to try to persuade their peers to agree with them. The ability to persuade others through oral argument is a powerful skill, one that certainly makes a study of editorial more meaningful and that has widespread application beyond the genre as well. In the following lesson, Jessica introduces students to the art of oral persuasion.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 4—Reading Workshop

AREA OF STUDY:	Accountable talk
FOCUS:	Persuading your peers
RESPONSE:	Small-group discussions

Jessica gently coaxed Bunthoun up to the front of the room. In listening to his conversations over the past few weeks, she knew that he was her most gifted student in oral argument. Before class had begun, she prepared him: he was to try to convince her that cloning was a bad idea. The class had examined opposing editorials about the issue the day before, and Bunthoun had written a persuasive response in support of the “con” side in his journal. Now, it was his job to try to convince the teacher to agree with him. This challenge was explained to the class, who were told to observe carefully, paying particular attention to the techniques that Bunthoun used: “What kinds of things does he do to convince me?”

Jessica and Bunthoun took seats facing each other. Bunthoun began the discussion by asking Ms. Lawrence what she thought about cloning. She wavered a bit and explained that she wasn’t really sure but thought that in general it might have some potential benefits. Bunthoun immediately began questioning her about the details of those benefits: “If you don’t know what the benefits are, how do you know it’s worth the price?” “What do you think the limits should be?” “How do you know that people would respect the limits?” He provided hypothetical examples to force Ms. Lawrence to consider the practical applications of any cloning policy: “Say that scientists wanted to clone people, who would decide who got cloned?” And he did an excellent job of making the argument personal: “Would you want to be cloned, Ms. Lawrence?” “What if someone stole your DNA and cloned you anyway?” In the end, Ms. Lawrence admitted that she still wanted more information but that she found many of Bunthoun’s questions very thought-provoking.

Because the model discussion had been presented as a challenge, the students paid close attention; they really wanted to see if Bunthoun could “take down” Ms. Lawrence. Although this was no WWF match, Bunthoun had done an outstanding job of being persuasive. After listening to him, the class was able to develop a great list of persuasive techniques that could be applied to their own discussions:

Debate Techniques for Persuading Your Opponent

- Ask questions.
- Use evidence from the text.
- Make it personal. Challenge your opponent about what he or she would do if directly affected by the issue.
- Use examples and ideas from your own experience.
- Don’t need to state own opinion; can just question opponent’s ideas.
- Stay calm.
- Listen carefully to the other person’s views.
- Don’t give up.
- Be respectful even when you are disagreeing.

Jessica and the class gave Bunthoun a round of applause, and then the rest of the students were invited to apply his techniques in their own debates. After allowing time for students to refamiliarize themselves with the cloning editorials, Jessica rearranged table groupings to make sure that every table had at least one member who supported the “yes” side and one member who supported the “no” side. Then students were instructed to try to convince each other. Twenty minutes later she had to call a halt. For this class, this was a long time to debate. Students felt passionate about the issue, and loved the challenge of trying to convince their peers. The verbal sparring felt like a game, but a game with real stakes. It was simultaneously fun and infuriating to try to get others to come around to your way of thinking. Michelle summed up the feelings of many when she said, “I liked this, but it was also really frustrating, because when we started, I knew what I thought, but then they asked me all these questions, and now I’m just not sure.”



Students were becoming confused, and we counted this a good thing. We wanted students to recognize that the world is not uniformly filled with starkly contrasting, absolute opinions. While there are always a few people at opposite ends of the opinion spectrum, the majority of us are somewhere in the gray area in the middle, believing that capital punishment, for example, may be appropriate in some cases, but wanting to see it used sparingly.

Teaching students to question and debate editorial texts supported their ability to grapple with the complexities of controversial issues. During the final weeks of the editorial study, we built on students’ growing abilities by teaching them to question not just the editorial but also the issues surrounding the text, to consider what was not said as well as what was said. Together the class thought about what to do with questions once they were asked, recognizing those that required an immediate response (usually questions related to vocabulary or background information), those that might make interesting research for later, and those that could be allowed to remain unanswered. And they considered where answers to questions might be found: in research materials, in the text itself, or most frequently, in their own hearts and minds. Students discovered that ultimately they were the ones who had to make decisions about the most vexing of questions. Are the benefits of increased security worth the loss of some personal privacy? Should we limit people’s right to free speech if what they say might hurt a person or group?

Throughout this time, Jessica supported students’ growth by providing rich editorial texts, models of questioning, and lots of time for student-to-student debate. She also encouraged students to follow their public questioning and debating with private decision making. Good citizens ask questions, listen to many differing opinions, recognize the complexity of issues, and ultimately determine their

opinions for themselves. We wanted students to become independent thinkers by following a similar practice. So, as the study drew to a close, Jessica increasingly encouraged students to make use of reading response journals to respond to the text and to the issues, to determine for themselves where they stood and why.

The response of one student to a *Teen Ink* editorial follows:

Response to “Book Banning”

Rosy

This editorial is very powerful. The author uses great persuasive language and powerful quotes to make us believe that book banning is bad. He says things like, “Book banning will bring about a new Dark Ages,” and compares the things that we see on TV to the things people are scared of in books.

As an author myself, I agree that the idea of banning books is bad. I don’t like the idea that someone would prevent me from reading what I want to just because they might think it is too scary or whatever. I like what the editorial says about how reading about things in books helps people to figure things out in real life. I think that’s very true.

But when I ask myself, “Are there any books worth banning?” then I think that the answer is yes. Books that spread lies about people or teach hate of a particular group should be banned. So should books that teach people how to build nuclear bombs. The editorial never mentions these things. The closest it comes is when it says, “Imagine if we weren’t allowed to read *A Farewell to Arms*, *Of Mice and Men*, or even *Fahrenheit 451*? What morals, knowledge, and history would we be missing?” I have never read those books, so I don’t know what I might be missing, but I do know that some books it might make sense to ban. The author says that “reading is an essential part of gaining knowledge,” but what if the book you read is full of hate and lies? I don’t think that reading that kind of book would help me to gain knowledge.

In general, I agree with this editorial. I think that people should be able to write and read what they want. But I also think that there should be limits. I don’t want the government or my teacher telling me what I can and cannot read, but I also don’t want someone to be able to print lies about me that will hurt me. The author has a very one-sided view of the issue of book banning, but I think that it is more complicated.

Teaching the Unit—Writing Workshop

Editorial writers must feel passionately about their topic. For most of Jessica’s students, the idea of being passionate about writing was a new concept.

Writing Workshop—Editorial Goals and Instructional Focus Progression		
Text Structure Study		Writing Process Study
Goal: Students will recognize and learn to use the structure and techniques of editorial text. Students will learn to choose structure and techniques appropriate to their issue and their audience.		Goal: Students will learn to build on their passion for an issue to craft a well-organized and persuasive editorial.
Weeks 1–2	Defining an Editorial Students will construct a clear and exacting definition of an editorial. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the defining characteristics of an editorial? What must an editorial have? What may an editorial have?• What is the purpose of an editorial?• For whom is an editorial written? Why is audience so important to editorial text?	Finding Your Passion Students will consider the controversial issues and questions about which they are most passionate in order to select an editorial topic. Collecting Ideas and Information Students will use their own experiences, those of acquaintances, and (easily accessible) texts and Web sites to gather information related to their editorial topic.
Weeks 3–4	Understanding the Structure of an Editorial Students will recognize and learn to use the structural elements of an editorial. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the author’s goal for each section or paragraph of an editorial? What purpose does it serve?• How do the various elements of the text work together to support the author’s position?• Are all of the elements essential in every editorial? Why, or why not? How do authors make their structure fit their issue and audience? Crafting Argumentative Text Students will analyze and learn to use the techniques appropriate to argumentative text. Among the techniques to be explored are the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building transitions• Integrating facts, statistics, and quotations• Using comparisons• Introducing anecdotes• Introducing and refuting the opposing point of view	Organizing Information and Ideas Students will organize their information and ideas in a manner appropriate to their topic and audience. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is your audience? What information and ideas will be most persuasive to your audience? Why?• How can those pieces of information and ideas be best organized? Which elements of the organizational structure should be used? Why? Outlining and Drafting Students will outline their editorial and then draft it in a manner that incorporates appropriate argumentative text elements.
Weeks 5–6	Persuading Your Audience Students will recognize and learn to use persuasive techniques and language in order to more effectively appeal to their audience. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What language and techniques do authors use to appeal to their audience?• How do the language and techniques used complement the issue and audience addressed?• Which techniques would be most effective with your editorial topic and audience? Why? How can these be effectively integrated into your text?	Review and Revision Students will learn to put themselves in the position of their audience in order to reread and revise their editorial. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What parts of your editorial are most convincing? least convincing?• Are there additional arguments or evidence that should be included?• Is your language and structure accessible? Is it persuasive?• How could the editorial be strengthened? Evaluating the Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a set of evaluation criteria• Measure your final published piece against established criteria• Reflect on learning

Although they may have been interested in topics before, this was unfamiliar territory. To inspire students, Jessica surrounded them with information about controversial issues. Nonfiction texts filled the room. Editorials that had been read and marked up during reading workshop were posted prominently. Lists of controversial issues were drawn up. Student discussions about potential topics were encouraged. Jessica modeled her process of finding her own passion. And lots of student reflection was encouraged through journal writing and one-to-one conferring.

As we neared the end of that first week of writing workshop, every student had found at least one potential topic about which he or she felt passionately, ranging from teen pregnancy to fur coats to euthanasia to domestic violence to racial profiling. However, despite their passion for these topics, many students were at a loss as to how to approach their topics in their writing. Derrick, for example, knew that he wanted to write about teen drug use. But when I questioned him about his editorial plans, his repeated answer was, “I don’t know.” He didn’t know what aspect of drug use he wanted to address; he didn’t know if he wanted to punish users or send them to treatment programs. He wasn’t sure whether drug education should be taught in school or if the medicinal use of marijuana was appropriate. The more I asked, the more frustrated Derrick became: “I just want to say that drug use is bad, okay?”

Well, no, it’s not okay. For an editorial to be effective, it needs to have a specific goal addressing a specific issue and targeting a specific audience. It was not enough for Derrick’s editorial to simply say that drug use is bad. He needed to address a controversial question within the larger topic. He needed to convince a specific group of people of a position related to drug use. Many students were exhibiting problems similar to Derrick’s, so Jessica and I decided to teach a lesson in which students would learn to reframe their issues as controversial questions. Our hope was that by asking questions, rather than simply making statements, students would better understand the controversial and persuasive nature of editorials, and that they would find specific issues within their larger topics that could be appropriately addressed through their writing.

SAMPLE LESSON:	Week 1—Writing Workshop
AREA OF STUDY:	Writing process
FOCUS:	Finding your passion
RESPONSE:	Development of controversial questions related to individual topics

“So you know that my topic is nutrition, right?” Jessica asked. Students nodded. Jessica had modeled her topic selection earlier in the week. “But I can’t just write

an editorial saying that nutrition is important. Pretty much everybody knows that nutrition is important, even if they don’t always eat well. I have to find a more controversial question to address. I’ve been doing some thinking, and here’s what I’ve come up with so far.” At the front of the room Jessica posted a list of five questions:

- Should cafeterias serve more nutritious lunches?
- Should students be taught about nutrition in school?
- Should junk food be taxed?
- Should there be classes for parents about nutrition?
- Should they sell junk food on campus?

She read through the list with the students, explaining a bit about each question, and thinking aloud about whether responding to that question would make for a good editorial. Then she asked students for their suggestions. Some offered great ideas, and Jessica added their questions to the list: “Should more choices be available at lunch?” “Should fast food restaurants offer healthier options?” “Should gym be required?”

Others offered questions that didn’t work well for Jessica’s purpose. Fact-based and research-oriented questions, such as “What kinds of food are good for you?” were politely set aside. Jessica explained that these questions weren’t really appropriate for an editorial to address; they were more about information than persuasion. Her explanations of which questions were appropriate and which weren’t helped students develop a list of questions for the nutrition topic and, more important, provided them with an understanding of the types of questions that editorials typically address.

To make certain that this understanding was strong, Jessica reviewed the process explicitly. “What kinds of questions are appropriate for editorials to address?” she asked. She charted students’ responses, creating a guide for them to use as they developed questions related to their own editorial topics:

Questions That Can Spark an Editorial

- Have more than one reasonable answer
- Often begin with *should*
- Focus on smaller issues within the larger topic

Jessica then issued a challenge: Ask eight questions about your topic that meet these criteria. Students groaned. “Why do we need to ask eight, Ms. Lawrence? We’re only going to write one editorial; can’t we just ask one question?” Jessica responded that sometimes the best ideas are not the first ideas and that she

wanted them to have a chance to consider multiple issues when they were shaping their editorials. They grudgingly agreed and went to work.

It took a bit of time and some prompting from Jessica and myself, but students were able to generate some great lists. Derrick, for example, had questions ranging from “Should drug users be sent to jail?” to “Should schools give drug tests to students?” As they developed questions that caught their attention, excitement grew. By framing their topics as questions, students were beginning to see the purpose for their writing.



To determine which question to respond to in their editorial, we asked students to consider several factors: What issue do you feel most passionately about? What issue is most familiar or accessible? Will you be able to reach your intended audience? These questions were designed to balance the practical and the idealistic nature of writing an editorial. We absolutely wanted students to respond to an issue that they felt strongly about; without passion, the work would simply be an exercise that would quickly be forgotten. At the same time, we needed students to work on an issue that was familiar and accessible. They would need to be able to gather evidence and arguments to support their position, and we didn’t have the time or the resources to pursue an extended research study. Finally, we asked students to consider their audience. Since editorials are intended to persuade, it is essential that they be able to reach the people who need to be persuaded. We talked with students about possible ways to publish their work—in a community newsletter, the school paper, or through a letter addressed to a targeted audience—and asked them to consider whether one or more of these methods would allow them to reach their intended audience.

After issues had been selected and students’ positions determined, we got into the nitty-gritty of editorial writing: gathering arguments and evidence. Initially we told students to write down any ideas they could think of. The class brainstormed potential supporting arguments and thought about counterarguments. They considered the various types of evidence that could be included: personal anecdote, hypothetical example, facts, statistics, and so on. And they searched through their own experiences as well as a few books and Internet sites to find evidence to support their position. Near the end of the second week, most students had quite a list of ideas. And that was great. But we didn’t want every idea to be thrown randomly into the editorial. Students needed to be more selective, choosing the most persuasive arguments and the best evidence. In the following lesson, Jessica begins to teach that process by showing students how to use their knowledge of their audience to choose their arguments.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 2—Writing Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: Writing process

FOCUS: Organizing information and ideas

RESPONSE: Audience profile, and argument and evidence selection for student editorials

“Should junk food be sold on campus?” Jessica wrote her focus question at the top of a piece of chart paper. Previously she had determined her position—that soda and snack machines should be removed from campus—and her target audience, parents of students enrolled in the school. But today she wanted to model the process of looking more closely at the intended audience and using audience information to determine the arguments and evidence that she would include in her editorial.

“So, my audience is your parents,” Jessica began, thinking aloud. “What do I know about your parents?” On the chart paper, Jessica listed what she knew about her intended audience: they care about their kids, they want their children to be successful in school, many work, often money is tight, some struggle with their own health problems, and so on. Despite the occasional giggle or snort of disagreement, students generally agreed with Ms. Lawrence’s description.

Jessica then taped up a previously developed chart that showed potential arguments and evidence that supported her position. Students were familiar with the chart, and many had similar lists in their notebooks related to their research and brainstorming for their own topics. “There are lots of ideas and pieces of information here,” Jessica observed. “Too many for one editorial. It was important to gather together all of these potential arguments and evidence so that I really understood the issue and felt firm in my position. But now it is time to choose which arguments and which evidence will be most convincing for my readers.

“For example,” she continued, “this argument about cost. Since I know that money is tight in many households, I think that would be a really strong argument to use to convince parents. If I show how much students spend on soda and junk food each month, I think that parents would be really convinced. The money that kids ask for really adds up and could make a difference in parents’ ability to buy clothes, food, and other essentials.” Jessica used a marker to put an orange star next to this argument and the evidence to support it. Then she continued through her list, talking about each idea or piece of information and explaining why it would or would not appeal to her audience. After completing her first pass through the list, she made a second sweep, limiting her selection to the three strongest arguments.

Once the decisions were made, Jessica reviewed her process with the students. Together, they went through her steps to develop a list of guidelines that could apply to students' own work:

Choosing Arguments and Evidence

- *Describe your audience.* General description of who they are and what they are like.
- *Consider their position on the issue.* What do they already know? How do they feel about it?
- *Review your arguments and evidence.* Which would appeal to the audience? Why? Which would not appeal? Why not?
- *Choose the best arguments and evidence.* Which are the most convincing? Why?

Then students were sent to work on their own writing. This process was a challenge because it forced them to recognize shortcomings in their work thus far. Some realized that they didn't know enough about their target audience or that they needed to define their audience more narrowly. Some had difficulty because they simply had too few arguments and too little evidence, making tailoring difficult, while others had so many ideas listed that they had trouble choosing. However, despite these difficulties, the lesson was one that students found very helpful. Focusing on their audience forced students to pull together the work and research they had done thus far and to consider how it might be shaped into a strong editorial. My favorite comment came from a student who reluctantly eliminated her favorite argument after realizing it didn't address her intended audience: "That's the argument that makes the most sense to me, but I am not the audience, and I have to find things that make sense to them."



Getting students organized is always a challenge. But it is an even greater challenge when the organizing structure that they'll need to use is unfamiliar. Therefore, before we even began to work on organizing students' editorials, we set out to help students develop an in-depth understanding of the structure of editorial text.

It would have been simple to hand students a predeveloped outline of an editorial and tell them to use it to begin organizing their own, but it wouldn't have been very helpful. Students didn't need a graphic organizer with unfamiliar terms such as "position statement," "argument," and "counterargument." What they needed was an understanding of how these structural elements work. They needed to see what these things looked like and how they could be used to support an author's purpose. By analyzing how other authors crafted and used structural elements,

students would have a better understanding of how they themselves might craft and use those elements in their own editorials.

SAMPLE LESSON:	Week 3—Writing Workshop
AREA OF STUDY:	Text structure
FOCUS:	Understanding the structure of an editorial
TEXTS:	"Should Teens Be Tried as Adults?" by Julia Kay and Rocio Nieves, from <i>New York Times Upfront</i> ; various other texts
RESPONSE:	Small-group analysis of published editorial

On the overhead Jessica placed a transparency of the "yes" response to "Should Teens Be Tried as Adults?" This text was straightforward in its organization and structure. Students had previously read and questioned the editorial as readers; now they would return to it as writers.

Together the class read through the editorial, pausing at the end of each section to consider its purpose. "What is the author's goal here?" Jessica repeatedly asked. "What is the purpose of this paragraph?" It took a few moments for students to shift their thinking from that of readers analyzing the content to that of writers analyzing the structure. But Jessica persisted, modeling potential responses and supplying students with language appropriate to the task. For example, when a student explained, "The author is explaining how she feels about the issue," Jessica responded, "Yes, she's stating her *position*." She then drew a box around that section of the text and wrote "Position" at the top.

Jessica drew boxes around all sections of the text, each delineating a particular structural element of the editorial. When the analysis was done, the class had identified and labeled five separate components: position, supporting argument 1, supporting argument 2, counterargument, and conclusion. Then came a bit of magic. Jessica had previously laid a blank transparency on top of the one with the editorial text. When students were finished analyzing "Should Students Be Tried as Adults?" she pulled the text transparency off the overhead, leaving a blank version of the outline on the screen. (Okay, so it's not magic, but the kids thought it was pretty cool.)

"This is one way," Jessica explained, referring to the boxed outline on the screen, "that an editorial text can be organized. I could use this structure to organize my own editorial, filling in my position statement and arguments in appropriate boxes. But this isn't the only organizing structure that is possible. Other editorials may not include all these things; they may be in a different order, or they may include other structural elements that aren't listed here. Your job now is to do some analysis of your own."

She organized students into groups of three and distributed to each group clean copies of two previously read editorials. The students then worked together to repeat the process that their teacher had modeled on the overhead: reading a section, considering its purpose, boxing, and labeling each piece of text accordingly. As students worked, they debated where to draw the lines, haggling over the purpose of each paragraph and sometimes the sentences within the paragraph. Jessica and I moved in and out of groups, introducing questions to push students to consider the text further. “Why do you think the author of that text chose to put the counterargument before the argument?” “Why do you think that author left off a narrative and jumped straight into the position?” “How many arguments did this author use? Is that enough?”

By the time we called students back together, the class was able to identify eight different structural components that could be found in editorial texts. More important, students could explain the purpose behind each element.

Editorial Structure

- *Introduction.* Builds reader interest in the topic.
- *Background information.* Provides general information about the issue.
- *Position.* States the author’s position on the issue.
- *Argument 1.* Explains one reason why the author’s position is correct.
- *Argument 2.* Explains a second reason why the author’s position is correct.
- *Argument 3.* Explains a third reason why the author’s position is correct.
- *Counterargument.* Explains why the other side is wrong.
- *Conclusion.* Restates opinion; gives reader a mandate.

“Which elements do you think are absolutely necessary?” Jessica asked. Students agreed that editorials absolutely needed to have a position and at least one argument, although as one student pointed out, “If that’s all there is, then it’s not going to be very convincing.” Jessica smiled. “Okay, then, how do authors decide which of the other elements to include?” Student response: “It depends.” They explained that it depended on the audience, the strength of the arguments, and the availability of the evidence. Often they were able to point to specific text examples, explaining, for instance, that the authors of “Should Teens Be Tried as Adults?” didn’t need to provide any background information because “everybody already knows about that issue.”

In the end, students decided that there was no one best way to organize an editorial. There were standard components of an editorial text, a clear structure from which all authors seemed to pull elements. But the elements that were used and the manner in which they were organized were necessarily determined according to the purpose of the individual author.



How to insert thoughtfully chosen arguments into a clear editorial structure seems like it should be obvious, but it is not. Many students struggled to find the best way to organize their editorials. In some cases, these struggles represented problems of understanding, and for these students, Jessica and I stepped in to help. But more often students struggled because they saw multiple possibilities and weren’t sure which one was best. “If I put my position first, then it makes a really strong statement,” explained one student, “but that may turn some people off. Maybe I should start with an example.” “Do you think I should use two supporting arguments or three?” asked another student. “My third argument isn’t as strong, but it might help convince a few people.” These were healthy struggles, and we encouraged students to talk to each other, experiment in their outlines, and weigh the effect of their choices on their audience.

After observing their thoughtful outlining, Jessica and I looked forward to receiving the first round of student drafts. Our enthusiasm dimmed, however, when we saw their work. A few had completely ignored their outlines. The results were disastrous: disorganized information, unsupported ideas, and redundant arguments. These students were sent back to find their outlines and try again. On the other hand, many of the drafts from students who had used their outlines also fell flat. They did a much better job of organizing ideas and following a clear structure, but many followed their outlines too closely. The pieces were all there, but they weren’t developed. Students had failed to explain the relationships between their ideas. There was no clear connection between the author’s position (typically stated right up-front) and the subsequent paragraphs detailing what should have been supporting arguments and evidence. The text read like a series of choppy, disconnected paragraphs. Writing conferences revealed that, in their heads, students understood the connections that were inherent in their work but that they didn’t know how to make those connections explicit to the reader. Therefore, we decided to teach a lesson on transitions.

SAMPLE LESSON:	Week 4—Writing Workshop
AREA OF STUDY:	Text structure
FOCUS:	Crafting transitions in nonfiction text
RESPONSE:	Revision of individual writing

Jessica began with a straightforward example. “Let’s say you want to persuade your mom to let you stay out past your curfew. Which of the following two requests would be more effective in convincing her? ‘I always return home on time. I want

to stay out later this time' or 'Since I have always returned home on time in the past, I can be trusted to stay out a little later this time.'" Students unanimously chose the second one. Why? "It explains it more." "It tells you why being on time before is important." "It sounds less like whining." "My mom would like it better."

Jessica agreed with all these explanations but wanted to push students to understand further. "When you are trying to persuade someone of something," she explained, "you have to make it very clear how your *argument* supports your *position*. That is what the second request does. It shows how the argument—you've always been on time in the past—supports the position—you should get to stay out later this time. The connection between these two ideas is called a transition. The first request doesn't have a transition and neither, I'm sorry to say, do many of your editorials. Many of you have great ideas and great evidence, but you aren't connecting them all to your main position. Now, you may think that the connection is self-evident, but you can't assume that your audience will just figure it out. You have to make the connections obvious. So today we are going to work on building transitions."

On the overhead she placed a pared-down version of a student's editorial:

Position: People should not buy fur clothing.

Argument 1: The animals are treated poorly.

Argument 2: Many animals are killed.

Argument 3: There are lots of fur substitutes.

"We're not going to worry about the evidence for now," Jessica said. "I just want you to think about the first sentence or two of each paragraph. How can we get from this (the position) to this (the argument)? For example, if I just say, 'The animals are treated poorly,' does that convince you it's a bad idea to buy fur? No! So, as an author, I need to think, how can I show the relationship between buying fur and the poor treatment of animals? Any ideas?" A few students volunteered ideas. Jessica listened and then combined their suggestions into the following: "If you buy fur, then you are contributing to the poor treatment of animals." "Great," Jessica enthused. "Now, if I were writing this editorial, I would go on to describe the awful conditions of the housing, the poor diet, the lack of freedom, the smell—all the gross and gruesome stuff about how these animals are treated. And because we've made the connection right at the beginning between the people who buy the fur and the treatment of the animals, we've made it really clear that all the information relates back to my central position: people should not buy fur clothing."

The class repeated the process to build a transition for the second argument. The result: "In order for you to wear that lovely fur coat, many animals had to lose

their lives." Again, Jessica praised the utility of the transition: "This is good. It allows the author to go on to describe just how many animals have to lose their lives to make a coat, jacket, hat, or other item. And it makes it clear that the person who buys the fur is responsible for all of those deaths."

By now students were catching on to this transition idea. So, for the third argument, Jessica changed pace a bit. Rather than having students share their initial ideas, she challenged them to write down sample transitions in their writing notebooks. This gave students a chance to try building a transition or two for themselves. We got a terrific range of ideas. Everything from the simple "People should not buy fur because there are lots of fur substitutes available" to the more original "Unlike in the old days, there are lots of alternatives to fur today. There is no need to kill animals in order to get a warm coat."

After a few minutes of experimentation, Jessica called the students back together and encouraged them to share their ideas. As they did, she charted, underlining the words and phrases that could be used with any issue as a way of establishing connections between a position and arguments. The result:

Transition Sentence Starters

- People shouldn't buy fur *because* . . .
- *Another reason* people shouldn't buy fur is . . .
- *If* people buy fur, *then* . . .
- *When* people buy fur, *it causes* . . .
- *It is a problem* when people buy fur *because* . . .
- *One result* of people's buying fur is . . .
- *An example of the problems* that buying fur causes is . . .
- *Since* . . . , people do not need to buy fur.

This list provided students with a strong selection of possible transitions to apply to their own writing. And that was, of course, the next step. Students were asked to go back and reread their work. "Look for the transitions in your work," Jessica instructed. "If they are there, highlight them. If not, figure out a way to make a transition between your position and your arguments. Get creative. You don't need to stick to our list of transition sentence starters. But each paragraph must begin with some sort of transition that connects your argument to your position."

Working with editorials that were in various stages of completion was much more challenging than simply writing from a basic outline. Despite Jessica's clear instructions, many students struggled to find a way to integrate transitions into their writing. The list of transition sentence starters proved very helpful for many. Others were able to develop great original transitions on their own. But quite a

few needed direct one-on-one help through a writing conference. They knew what they were supposed to do, but they couldn't quite figure out how to make it happen in their own writing. However, once the transitions clicked, many students were amazed at how readily the rest of their argument flowed. Several wrote whole new paragraphs, because, as William explained, "Once I got the transition worked out, the rest of it just came. It was easy."



A lesson on transitions, demonstrations of how to use evidence, and lots of individual writing conferences helped to clear up confusing, choppy editorials. By the fifth week of the study, nearly everyone had a well-organized and substantiated draft of an argumentative essay. However, when trying to convince an audience, more is needed than organization and substantiation. It is necessary to really grab readers, to shock and surprise, to appeal to their emotions, drill ideas into their heads, and leave them feeling energized for action. Students (and teachers) had been so preoccupied with getting their editorials to be clear that they had often failed to communicate their passion to their audience.

By analyzing favorite published editorials, students recognized the following persuasive techniques as possible ways to communicate passion through text:

Persuasive Techniques That May Be Used in Editorials

- Powerful introductions
- Repetition
- Rhetorical questions
- Appeals to emotion
- Strong conclusions
- Tone
- Comparison
- Hypothetical situations ("Imagine if . . .")
- Testimonials (first-person experiences)
- Strong language
- Attacks on the other side

There were too many techniques here for Jessica to teach each one. And doing so was not necessary. Many students were able to glean an understanding of appropriate techniques from model editorials and apply them on their own. However, some techniques were so important, and their application so universal that Jessica decided everyone would benefit from more in-depth analysis. In the following lesson, she leads students through an analysis of the effective use of introductions.

SAMPLE LESSON: **Week 5—Writing Workshop**

AREA OF STUDY:	Text structure
FOCUS:	Crafting introductions in persuasive writing
TEXTS:	Various
RESPONSE:	Analysis charts; independent revision

One copy of a chart for analyzing editorial introductions was distributed to each pair of students (see Figure 4.2). Their task, the students were informed, was to review the editorials in their folders and analyze the introductions. "Like so many things about editorials," Jessica explained, "there is no one set formula for what makes a great introduction. Great introductions can be funny, aggressive, or thought-provoking. It all depends on the author's purpose. Your job today is to consider what kinds of introductions are possible and what purposes they serve. You'll analyze published editorials first and then use the ideas you've learned to work on creating a great introduction for your own editorial."

Students set to work. With their partner they considered the match between the audience and the introduction of each editorial. They spent time describing the kinds of introductions they encountered, using phrases such as "sad story" and "what if? example" to describe a narrative testimonial and a hypothetical situation. Jessica and I smiled at some of their descriptions but didn't try to correct their terminology; their phrases made sense to them and were often more descriptive than ours. Students also considered the audience (not always easy to define in a nationally published editorial) and thought about whether the introduction would appeal to its intended readers. More than one group quickly decided that the introduction to "Brand-Name Schools" didn't work. The introduction reads, "Imagine going to a school where the uniforms are made by Nike, the cafeteria food comes from Pizza Hut, and the math lessons involve adding and subtracting M&M's, then eating the answer." The editorial was trying to argue that advertising in schools is a problem, but students didn't think that the introduction sounded too problematic. In fact, most thought that this sounded better than the reality of their own school. If this editorial was trying to appeal to kids, the students decided, it didn't work.

Students found two different editorials where the introduction was quite literally an introduction—of the author. One of these, students decided, didn't work. The author of "It's Time to Pay the Price" began his editorial as follows: "I am an eighth-grade student at Fowlerville Middle School, and I am upset over the way our teachers are being treated." Students decided that this statement was boring and didn't really add any value to his argument. After all, "There are lots of eighth-grade students; why should we pay attention to him?"

Figure 4.2 Chart for Analyzing Editorial Introductions

Title of the Editorial	Description of the Introduction	Intended Audience	How Does the Introduction Appeal to the Audience?	Does This Introduction Work? Why, or Why Not?
Example: "Should Students Do the Grading?—No"	A story about a realistic situation related to the editorial	Teenagers	It is trying to appeal to the emotions of the audience by showing them the horrors that might occur if students are allowed to grade papers.	Not really. The story doesn't seem believable. It makes the reader question the credibility of the author.

On the other hand, students heartily approved of the introduction to an editorial arguing against racial profiling. In the “no” response to “Is Racial Profiling Justified?” the author writes,

As a Palestinian-American, born in Jerusalem and raised in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., I have experienced racial profiling each time I return to my birthplace. Arriving at Tel Aviv’s airport as a young Arab male, I am assumed to be a threat. I am routinely interrogated; five times, I have been strip-searched. These remain the most dehumanizing events of my life.

This introduction, students decided was very valuable because it showed that the author was in a unique position to know about the issue.

After twenty minutes of analysis, Jessica called, “Time.” Students discussed their findings, sharing favorite or least favorite introductions and explaining why those introductions did or did not work. Then Jessica challenged them to think back to their own editorials: “Which type of introduction would work best for your purpose and your audience?” Students were encouraged to review their analysis notes, use the published texts as examples, and most important, consider their purpose. They were also urged to be creative: “Try out several different introductions. See which one works best. Don’t be afraid to ask your peers for their feedback; sometimes it helps when someone else takes a look.”

The very individual nature of crafting an introduction meant that student success varied tremendously. A few students ignored introductions entirely and

simply leaped right into their position statement. Some produced utilitarian introductions that were functional but didn’t prove overly persuasive. Others, however, drew inspiration from the samples they had analyzed and produced incredibly persuasive introductions that very much fit their purpose. Jamar, for example, used a shocking piece about a 911 call made by Nicole Brown Simpson to introduce his editorial about domestic abuse. Ramon, on the other hand, began his appeal to the school board with direct confrontation: “You want to prevent school violence, improve student achievement, and help students from low-income families to fit in. All of these are great goals. But, your solution, school uniforms, isn’t working.”



The final days of the editorial study were spent working to polish students’ editorials. Although there were the occasional whole-class lessons that focused on elements of grammar or revision, most of the work took place working with small groups or individuals, according to need. It would have been easy to get caught up in the mechanics of student work as a final deadline approached, but Jessica was smart; she made certain that the focus stayed right where it should be—on passion. As students worked to improve their use of persuasive techniques, solidify their arguments, and clean up their structure, Jessica repeatedly queried, “Are you showing your passion?” By keeping the focus on passion even as the study concluded, she ensured that students really owned and cared about their work.

In the end, there was a final flurry of self- and peer-assessment using the student-developed rubric and last-minute revisions, and then the editorials were gone, literally. Editorials are written for a purpose and need to be published with a purpose as well. Certainly, we kept copies for the class, but the originals were sent away to the school newspaper, the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the school board, the parent and staff newsletter, and even a few national publications. When this idea was initially discussed, students were intimidated by the concept of distributing their work so publicly, but the idea grew on them (and also served as a great motivator). By the time it came to addressing envelopes and drawing up a cover letter, students were in a state of nervous anticipation. For the majority, this was the first time they saw themselves as potential agents of change, realizing that they had power to make a difference, not some day, but now. Putting those letters in the mail was perhaps the most powerful lesson of the entire study.

Evaluating Student Progress . . .

This was an intense study. The nature and content of editorials meant that every day we were grappling with heavy issues and big questions. In both reading and

writing students were being asked to think and reflect, read and analyze. The pressure was on, and every now and then the class needed a break to “kick back” and recharge their batteries. But an interesting shift occurred midway through the study. The pressure source changed from being the teacher and the texts to being the students themselves. As they became aware of their power as readers to form their own opinions and as writers to persuade others, students began to put pressure on themselves. The students became the ones who pushed themselves to really take apart a text, develop strong arguments that would appeal their audience, ask hard questions that got to the heart of an issue, and infuse passion into their writing. Students became the owners of the study.

. . . in Reading Workshop

This was a very different class than the one that had begun this study six weeks earlier. Students were confident in their abilities, thoughtful in their opinions, and reflective about their process. Jessica and I delighted in listening to them describe their thoughts with phrases like, “I thought his argument was a little weak here because . . .,” “She has some great ideas, but doesn’t address a central question . . .,” “The evidence is very convincing because. . . .” These were phrases that would never have come out of their mouths before the study began, and now they tossed them out without even noticing. We had fun participating in the discussions; students worked hard to persuade others of their position, and a couple of times I found myself changing my own mind about issues. By the final weeks of the study, students craved substantive texts and articulate editorials. They were no longer content with *Junior Scholastic’s* three-paragraph editorials; they wanted the real thing. Ramon explained, “I like the editorials that are more controversial, not just the little ones about teen issues. The real editorials have more to question, more to think about. They help me form a good opinion.”

Of course, there were still struggles. Some students continued to have difficulty getting to the big questions on an issue; a few steadfastly refused to be vocal participants in discussions; and there remained many texts that were simply too difficult, either in reading level or content information, for the majority of students to handle. However, in attitude and process, these students had come a long way.

. . . in Writing Workshop

Jessica’s students repeatedly proved that passion can carry you a long way in editorial writing. The diversity of their topics, arguments, and styles was astounding, with each editorial reflecting the true passion of the writer. Their use of persuasive

language and techniques revealed both an understanding of craft and a remarkably strong desire to persuade their readers. They had clearly come to understand that they have a potential audience and that their words have power. Even among students who still struggled with structure or mechanics, their passion for their content shone through. This was particularly true of Malcolm. For weeks he appeared to do nothing except distract other students. I was amazed when, in the final week of the study, he handed me a typed copy of his editorial. I was blown away when I read it. His writing, directed at men who abuse their wives, was very raw but very powerful. He made wonderful use of his own experiences as a child to argue that women and their families should not be made to suffer. Although there were a few gaps in his argument and some structural difficulties, it was clear that Malcolm had been paying attention throughout the study. He had absorbed it all and used what he thought was most appropriate in order to communicate an idea about which he cared deeply. We might quibble with his grammar or encourage the use of an outline next time, but Malcolm had captured the essence of an editorial. When I asked him what had made him decide to write it, he commented, “I just thought maybe if I wrote about it, I could help somebody else. I dunno, I guess I was hoping I could change something.”

Here are samples of editorials that students created.

A Warning for Teens

LaTisha D., Grade 8

Jill is a fifteen-year-old teenage mom. She is struggling with her five-month-old baby, Jacob. Despite his promises that he would stay with her, her boyfriend is no longer in the picture. Every morning she wakes up at around 4:30 A.M. to his cry. On this morning she has a test at 8:30 A.M. She wants to do well, to succeed for the sake of her son, but she worries that she will fail. “I can’t get no sleep.” Why not? “Because I gotta wake up to a hollering baby,” Jill cries. “I just can’t take it. It’s too hard.” She picks up the baby and holds him in her arms, rocking him back and forth. He continues to holler. She plays with him, he still continues to cry. She checks his temperature to make sure that he isn’t running a fever. Then she realizes that he’s hungry. She furiously looks through cabinets for formula. She finally finds the formula can, but it is almost empty. She runs to her room and pulls out her last five dollars. Jacob is on the bed hollering his little heart out. Jill looks at him. “Okay baby, Mommy’s gonna buy some milk for you. Okay?”

Jill’s story is an example of the problems that many teenage parents will experience. Teens get pregnant every day. Some pregnancies are mistakes, but many are intentional. Some girls believe that having a baby will provide them with someone to love, and someone who will love them back. They think that

getting pregnant will guarantee that the father will stick around. And they think that everything will be okay because welfare will help take care of them. But that is not the case. Teens who have babies often end up alone, unhappy, and living in poverty without anything to offer their children.

Becoming a parent is a huge responsibility that completely changes your life. Most teens aren't emotionally ready to have a child. Babysitting can be fun for a while but parenthood is all day, every day. You have to be responsible to feed the baby every few hours, change the poopy diapers, console them when they cry, and nurture their development. This is your job all the time—you can't just leave the baby when you're tired or need a break. You can't go out on dates or with friends. Friends may come by at first to "help out," but gradually they'll drift away because you are not available to do the stuff you used to do. Some friends may no longer be allowed to come around because their parents are afraid they'll follow in your footsteps. And the baby won't replace your friends. The baby needs you to be their parent, not their playmate.

Wouldn't it be embarrassing for your friends to be graduating from high school while you are a ninth-grade dropout? It is hard to stay in school when you have a child. You have to find child care for the baby, and that can be expensive. Even when you are at home, it is hard to concentrate on your work and your baby at the same time. As a result many teen moms drop out. This may seem attractive if you don't like school. But you need an education. Education is the key to success. You need an education to accomplish your dreams. If you have a good education, you can have more job opportunities and you'll get further in life. By waiting to have kids until after you've completed your education, you'll provide a better life for yourself and for them.

Will you be able to provide for your baby? Babies may be small but they are expensive. Diapers, cars seats, clothes, toys, formula, and child care all cost a lot of money. Many teens think that they can support their baby with a minimum wage job, but minimum wage will barely even cover the cost of child care. Welfare payments are often small and parents and the baby's father may be unwilling to help. Even if you are able to provide for the baby, you'd have to give up the things that you like to buy like CDs, designer clothes, trips, and even favorite foods.

Are you ready to take on the full responsibility of raising a child? Are you willing to give up your freedom and future opportunities? When you really look at the full burden of raising a child, I think that you'll decide that it is better to wait. If you are smart, you will keep your legs closed and your pants up. Not having a baby while you're young is the smartest thing that you can do.

An Open Letter to the Board

Spring 2002

Dear Board of Education:

You want to prevent school violence, improve student achievement, and help students from low-income families to fit in. All of these are great goals. But, your solution, school uniforms, isn't working.

School officials believe that uniforms can protect students from gangs and violence. Certain gangs wear certain colors. Schools have uniforms to prevent them from wearing those colors. But students still sag (pulling their pants down) to show that they are gang-related or bring their colors to school on a bandanna. Even if they are required to wear navy blue and white, gang members still find a way to show their colors and violence still occurs. According to Officer Woods, the police officer in charge of our school, "Horace Mann Middle School has more crimes than Crawford High School." This means that Crawford, a high school with no uniform policy, has less violence than a middle school that has a strict uniform policy in place. Both of these schools serve the same population. If uniforms aren't preventing crimes and violence, why have them?

Also, school officials support the idea that uniforms make students pay more attention, in other words, make them more productive. At Long Beach School District, in California, many believe that uniforms have changed students around. But the truth is it is not uniforms that improved the students. At the same time that the uniform policy was put into place, teachers developed a stronger discipline policy and the district began cooperating with the police. It was more teachers disciplining their students more harshly and more patrol officers who did the job of improving student achievement. They're the ones who deserve the credit for all that has changed in the Long Beach District, not uniforms. At Mann, we have a uniform policy, but the teachers and police have not enforced a strict discipline policy, and our test scores have not gone up. If uniforms aren't improving student achievement, why have them?

An additional reason why officials claim that uniforms are needed is to help students from low-income families to fit in. However, these students' families often don't have the resources to buy uniforms. The students are forced to wear hand-me-downs, which make them stand out even more. Some students who don't want to wear hand-me-downs attend school in normal clothes, breaking the uniform policy. And that only makes things worse. Students get in trouble for breaking the rules and staff members have to go through the hassle of writing a referral, negative notes, phone calls home, lectures for students, and sometimes even suspensions. This takes a

lot of time away from class, all because a student's low-income status prevents him or her from wearing the right clothes required for school. If uniforms aren't helping low-income students to fit in, why have them?

Uniforms are not only ineffective, but they are also just a waste of money and time. They don't prevent violence. They don't help improve student achievement. They don't help students from low-income families. I strongly encourage you to end the uniform policy once and for all.

Sincerely,
Ramon P.
Grade 8

Suggested Texts

Editorials that are accessible for fourth- to tenth-grade readers are hard to find. The following are a few sources that Jessica and I found helpful. Of course, editorials change constantly, depending upon what is in the news. Thus, an editorial that works beautifully one year may be a flop the next (although there are some issues that, unfortunately, seem to be timeless, such as skateboarding on campus and school uniforms). When choosing editorials, be sure to choose texts that are at an appropriate reading level and are of high interest to the students, especially at the beginning of the study. Your local newspaper may also be a good source, but beware that too frequently editorials in daily papers build on previous editorials or news stories and require background knowledge that students may not possess.

Editorials

Grades 3–6

Junior Scholastic. Tel.: 800-560-6816; <<http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/>>. Most accessible of the editorial collections. Each editorial provides background information and pro and con viewpoints, which are good starting points but not substantive enough to serve on their own.

Write Time for Kids. Tel.: 800-662-4321; <<http://www.teachercreated.com/writetime/>>. Materials drawn from magazines like *Time for Kids* are published in kits for appropriate grade levels (grades 2–8). Each kit includes a “Persuasive” section with some strong editorial samples.

Grades 6–10 (Young Adult)

New York Times Upfront. Tel.: 800-560-6816; <<http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/upfront/>>. Published biweekly. Each issue includes an editorial

question with pro and cons. Some editorials by high school students, some by experts. Timely and well written.

Newsweek's “My Turn” column. Tel.: 800-632-1040; <<http://msnbc.com/>>; <<http://school.newsweek.com/>>. Written by people from all walks of life, these op-ed pieces make great sample texts.

Teen Ink. Tel.: 617-964-6800; <<http://TeenInk.com/>>. Monthly publication written by and for teenagers. Good diversity of topics and styles. Web site contains more than 900 editorials. Great place to submit student editorials.

USA Today. <<http://www.usatoday.com/>>. Most accessible of the daily newspapers. Written at a fourth-to-fifth-grade reading level. Editorials are often short and to the point.

Write Time for Kids. Tel.: 800-662-4321; <<http://www.teachercreated.com/writetime/>>. Materials drawn from magazines like *Time for Kids* are published in kits for appropriate grade levels (grades 2–8). Each kit includes a “Persuasive” section with some strong editorial samples.